

Cover of Assam has not shown a decrease of 12,833 sq. km. of very dense forests in the last five years. However, there has been a slight decrease in the dense forest area between 1999 and 2003 assessments (State of Forest Report) while at the same time, open forests has increased by 4,613 sq. km. thus resulting in a net increase in forest cover of 3,138 sq. km.

(c) The Hon'ble Supreme Court *vide* its orders dated 29.10.2002 in WP (C) 202/1995 has directed that no State or Union Territory shall permit any unlicensed saw-mills, veneer, plywood industry to operate and they are directed to close all such unlicensed unit forthwith. No State Government or Union Territory will permit the opening of any saw-mills, veneer or plywood industry without prior permission of the Central empowered Committee. The Chief Secretary of each State will ensure, strict compliance of this direction. There shall also be no relaxation of rules with regard to the grant to license without previous concurrence of the Central Empowered Committee.

Pursuant to these orders, no case from Assam regarding the violation of the above directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court has come to the notice of Central Government.

Moreover, as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, *vide* its order dated 4.3.1997, a High Power Committee has been constituted to oversee the strict and faithful implementation of the orders of the Court in the North Eastern region, including Assam.

Insurance cover for damage caused by wild animals

†1095 SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state

(a) whether any proposal is under consideration to provide insurance cover for the damage caused by wild animals;

(b) ifso, since when the proposal is under consideration;

(c) whether this would be implemented all over the country in a uniform manner; and

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) the details of the progress made to implement this insurance scheme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRINAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) There is no proposal under consideration of the Ministry to provide insurance cover for the damage caused by wild animals

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Use of plastic bags

†1096. SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL:
DR. PRABHATHAKUR:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the use of plastic bags is harmful to the environment and health;
- (b) whether plastic bags turn fertile land into barren land and pollute water; and
- (c) if so, the steps being taken by the Government to check production and use of plastic bags?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) Plastic (Polymers) are petroleum-products comprising of long-chain hydrocarbons. They are chemically inert or neutral and so used for the manufacture of a large number of consumer items. They can also be recycled. Plastics by themselves are not harmful. Only the indiscriminate littering of plastics and environmentally unsound recycling practices has the potential to cause adverse impacts on environment.

(c) To prohibit the use of recycled plastic for packaging of foodstuffs and to encourage proper waste collection, the Government has brought out the Plastics Manufacture and Usage Rules, 1999 as amended in 2003. These rules prohibit the use of recycled plastic bags for storing, carrying, dispensing, or packaging of foodstuffs. Also, these rules prohibit the

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.